

The 86th Airlift Wing has become USAF's main strategic airlift hub in Europe.

Ramstein on the

A C-130 from the 37th Airlift Squadron, Ramstein Air Base, flies over the Mosel River in the Rheinland-Pfalz region of southwestern Germany.

Wing

Photography by Guy Aceto, Art Director, and Paul Kennedy

Built in the 1950s, Ramstein AB, Germany, served as a US Air Force fighter base during the Cold War. It switched to the airlift mission in 1994. The 86th Airlift Wing is Ramstein's host unit, operating a transport hub for points in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. The base is located about 90 miles southwest of Frankfurt and is one of three major USAF installations in Germany. (The others are Spangdahlem Air Base and Rhein-Main Air Base.) United States Air Forces in Europe has been headquartered at Ramstein since 1973. It is also the largest NATO air base on the Continent, with elements of several European military forces on site. At right, transient aircraft fill the flight line at this 10,261-acre base.



At left, some of the aircraft that call Ramstein home. The wing's 37th Airlift Squadron and 38th AS (Provisional) fly C-130 Hercules transports. The 75th AS and 86th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron combine forces to provide medevac capability with C-9 Nightingales. The 76th AS uses C-20s and C-21s for VIP airlift within Europe. (Another airlift squadron, the 309th, is located at Chievres AB, Belgium.) The wing supports coalition forces in Operations Enduring Freedom, Northern Watch, and Southern Watch and regularly resupplies troops in the Balkans and Turkey.



Aircrews keep busy training. Above and at right, a C-130 carries out touch and go landings.





Above, a C-130 flies past the terra cotta-tiled roofs and half-timbered houses of a German village. Ramstein is about eight miles west of the town of Kaiserslautern and is part of the largest American community outside the continental US, the Kaiserslautern Military Community. It encompasses 38,000 military and US civilian personnel, a host of Army installations, and several air stations. The 86th AW commander, Brig. Gen. Erwin F. Lessel III, serves as commander of the K-Town community, too. At right, 37th AS pilot Capt. Daniel J. Begin prepares for evening practice runs.



Chaff and flares (far left) are standard equipment for these aircraft. Here, loadmaster A1C Vincent White readies a parachute for an air-dropped bundle. Each bundle is a sample load, rigged to fall as an "average size" delivery.



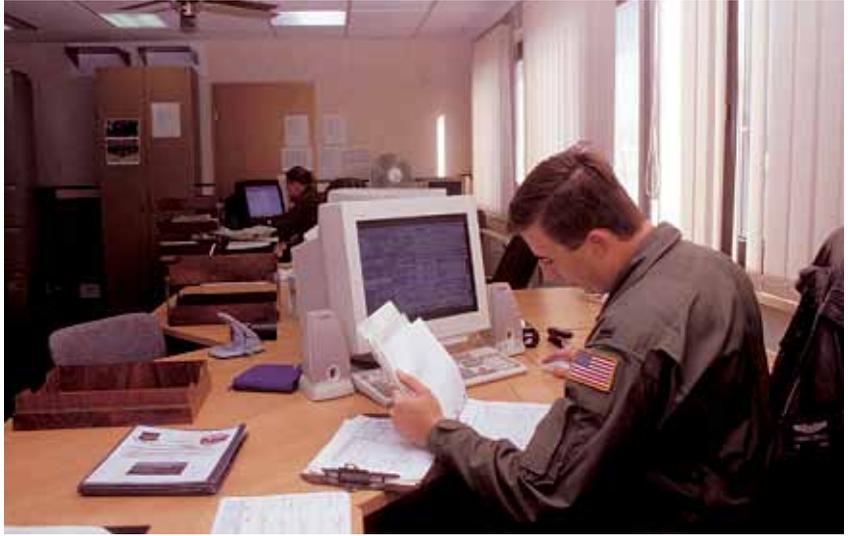
The maintainers at left ensure the airworthiness of these aircraft. The oldest C-130 transports at Ramstein were built in the 1960s, and base flying hours tripled during Enduring Freedom. In the war, the 37th AS was key to delivery of humanitarian daily rations over Afghanistan. The adverse weather aerial delivery system radar on these C-130s improves their capability to carry out such airdrops.

The 76th AS operates a small fleet of C-20 Gulfstream and C-21 Gates Learjet aircraft (at right and below). They transport top distinguished visitors and provide time-sensitive operational support airlift.



The wing's transition from fighters to airlifters began with the arrival of executive-fleet aircraft such as the one at left. In June 1992, the wing merged C-12s, C-20s, and C-21s into its ranks. About a year later, aeromedical evacuation and aeromedical airlift squadrons from Rhein-Main Air Base brought in C-9s. C-130 personnel began arriving in March 1994, and the unit officially became the 86th AW in October 1994.

At the 75th AS, 1st Lt. Tobias Ensele checks a schedule, at right. Below, Capt. Charlotte Meusel goes over maps. The squadron operates C-9As, most configured for aeromedical evacuation.



Staff photo by Guy Acefio



While the 75th AS provides the aircrew members for medevac missions, the medical personnel come from the 86th AES. Ramstein's aeromedical evacuation missions cover a huge area, ranging from Scandinavia to the Azores to Bahrain and beyond. The 75th has flown missions as far east as Moscow. In 2002, it transported more than 4,800 patients during routine missions and more than 100 needing priority or urgent medical evacuation. Many patients were headed for Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, the largest US military hospital in Europe, located a few miles from Ramstein. At left SSgt. Sean R. Morris and SSgt. Susan F. Clawson check over medical equipment.

TSgt. Greg Flood and SSgt. Reverdy Winfree go through maintenance procedures. USAF's twin-engine, swept-wing C-9s all began service between 1968 and 1975.



Lt. Col. Anthony C. Piso takes his walk around a C-9 in preparation for a mission to Incirlik AB, Turkey. Below, in the C-9's cockpit, 1st Lt. Abigail G. Albert goes through a preflight checklist as Capt. Grant C. Miller looks on. The air ambulance usually has a crew of three. The five medical personnel normally on board are two flight nurses and three medical technicians.



Photo by Paul Kennedy

Staff photo by Guy Aceto



When a C-9 carried out an aeromedical evacuation of special forces troops injured during Operation Anaconda last March, the medical personnel numbered 11, including three flight surgeons. Even a seemingly routine mission can hold challenges. In 1998, a Navy family member gave birth about 45 minutes after boarding a regularly scheduled flight from Sardinia to Naples. It was the first baby delivered in flight by the 86th AES.

Several patients board a C-9. The Nightingale is USAF's only aircraft specifically designed for litter and ambulatory patients. It can carry 40 patients. It has vacuum and therapeutic oxygen outlets and a special care area with a separate ventilation system.



Photo by Paul Kennedy



The 86th AW's list of missions continues to grow. About a year ago, the wing stood up its 28th unit, the 309th AS at Chievres. It uses C-9s and C-37s to transport NATO leaders. Ramstein inherits an additional strategic airlift mission when Rhein-Main Air Base closes in December 2005. In preparation, Ramstein opened a new passenger terminal in January 2002. The \$13 million facility and its annex are expected to handle 35,000 passengers a month. USAF last year directed the removal of the familiar red cross emblem from the C-9 fleet, so the aircraft can be used for nonmedical missions.



Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the number of USAFE main operating bases has shrunk by 67 percent, and units such as the 86th AW have been challenged to handle new roles with an increased operations tempo. Brig. Gen. Mark A. Volcheff, wing commander until May last year, put it this way: The 86th now must "fly in all directions, all the time." ■